

# Castlemaine Naturalist

August 2012

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Monthly newsletter of the  
Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc.



Eastern Spinebill

Photo – Noel Young

## Field Trip to Merrin Merrin Rita Mills

We seem to have had all sorts of problems with our field trips this year! This time we had a good turn up, inspired, doubtless, by Geoff Park's talk and marvellous images the night before. But as we headed south, we realized that the black clouds must have been situated right over the spot we were headed for. Instead of stopping and asking the rest of the group if they'd like to go to Long Swamp instead (I did think of that when it was too late!) I decided to just hope for the best.

It was drizzling when we got to Merrin Merrin, and the ones who'd brought their gum boots were at a distinct advantage. There is still lots of water in the swamp, and even for the short time we were there, we managed to make a respectable bird list. There were Masked Lapwings, about a dozen Black-fronted Dotterels, Swans, Pacific Black Ducks, Mudlarks, Magpies, Galahs, White-plumed Honeyeaters and a few LBJs. About eight White-faced Herons flew in and landed near where a **Brolga** we were watching was striding along further over. These swamps have been used by nesting Brolgas in the past, and I wondered if its mate was nearby.

On the way there we had spotted Mountain Ducks and a Black-shouldered Kite. By the time we'd been there for about three quarters of an hour, we decided that as Clunes was only about eight kms down the road, the cafe there would definitely be cosier and friendlier than sitting in the cars getting colder, so most of us headed further south, and enjoyed a cuppa in the warm before heading back to Castlemaine.

For me one of the joys of the trip was the great billowing clouds that are a feature of those plains.

## **Reminiscences of a conservationist**

By Colin Officer

I don't know the names of the mostly pastoral weeds I've been digging up these 30 years in my old Broadford garden. I kept the 0.6 Ha largely free of weeds simply with garden fork etc. It was later invaded at its front fence by Oxalis – I could never beat that one!

I never used chemicals for fear of their toxicity to birds and other fauna. My aim was to create a “bird garden” from its inception in 1980/81. It had a Chinese Wisteria and two Camelias – both valued by Honey-eaters.

There was one introduced grass with long seeding stems which the Red-browed Finches adored. Ellen McCulloch had it identified as a “Setaria” species from South America I think, so I looked after that one.

My second wife bought a larger (1 Ha) block next door. It was full of docks and several blackberry bushes. It also had a row of ancient Pinus radiata - one only being on our home block. It was very much appreciated by cockatoo species as food and by smaller species for nesting.

This block had been the Broadford “Night Soil” dumping ground, but Marie wanted to stop anybody building close to her. I dug up enormous numbers of weeds, including all the docks eventually. The local Fire Brigade burned them up over some years. I also gradually removed Blackberries by saw and burning the roots, - to please the neighbours and local government.

Unfortunately, these were a prime refuge for several passerine species, especially the Red-browed Finches, Blue Wrens and Scrub Wrens. The last named did a twice-a-day circumference of my garden picking up insects, etc. Very Tame.

My second wife's cat wrought havoc amongst the birdlife, till it died of natural causes. She said she would never have another – till a “friend” gave her a kitten! While still young it had genuine fatal M.C.A. No more cats!

After 16 years my second wife and I decided to part company (1995). I've lived alone since. My first beloved wife had died in 1978, she was a doctor too. Our big problem in Seymour was to attract new doctors – we had two to handle the hospital and treat a population of over 7000, so Margaret and I went overseas and doubled the number of F/T practising doctors (1965). In 1964 I helped form the Seymour Historical Society – as Hon Sec and

then as second President. During this period the society had an expedition to help save the Castlemaine Market, perilously close to falling down. I followed up being Hon Sec by purchasing a beaut little (1913) shunting steam locomotive. The engine drivers raised much of the needed money; Seymour needed an icon for its transportation scenario.

How does one raise the image of a town which does not believe in itself? Margaret re-built its health infrastructure as M.O.H., getting a treated water supply, sewerage, new housing and slum clearance. More involvement by the Army (parades etc.) and a number of greatly needed ancillary services like District Nursing Services, Welfare Officers (2), etc. We now had guaranteed time off after nearly 10 years!!

We built a house at Nelson and got involved in trying to save the Lower Glenelg National Park. Fred Davies, a farmer, was Hon Sec of the L.G.N.P Committee. He was tipped off to look after us and taught me how to run a conservation area. (Do's and Don't's) I had cousins in London running the small Selbourne Society and its woodland in West London, Britain's oldest conservation society of course. They gave me Gilbert White's "Natural History and antiquities of Selbourne" to read, which envisaged human history and nature conservation in partnership. The Seymour Historical Society gasped! The book was actually on sale in London for Xmas 1788 (Publication usually given as 1789)

The Selbourne Society for the Preservation of Birds, Plants and Pleasant Places was formed in January 1886. The RSPB (Royal Society for the Preservation of Birds) was formed in 1898 but overtook it. It grew from 6000 in 1946 to 500,000 members in 1989. I still belong to the Selbourne Society. It has a relict woodland "Perivale Wood", just 11 Ha. but with a canal corridor, all in memory of Gilbert White, the naturalist and parson.

So that's how I started my conservation career in what is now the Mitchell Shire. My local M.P. Fred Grimwade gave me lunch with Bill Borthwick and I started writing submissions for the conservation committee of the Rotary Club of Seymour. On application the Army agreed to restore emus to the Puckapunyal Military Area - and being from Canberra they soon increased in numbers. I wrote it up for "The Bird Observer".

Moving to the Broadford Shire in 1980 I formed a conservation group - soon to become part of the 1984 "B.E.A.M". Broadford Environmental Movement Inc. (now BEAM Mitchell Environmental Group Inc). We persuaded Mitchell Shire Council to form a Shire Environment Committee, meeting monthly. I started (backed by Rotary) the Seymour Bushland

Reserve in the late 1970's. Lesley Dalziel fought a solo battle against Seymour Shire in the 1990's; Mitchell Shire after amalgamation concurring to form the 140Ha Australian Light Horse Memorial Park in 1998 I think. It was a massive rubbish dump and a soil conservation nightmare. The Army cleared the first and Canberra gave funding for the second. It is now a memorial to the Army and a reserve for wildlife – combining the Seymour Bushland Reserve (60 Ha.) in this respect, though under separate committees. A total of 200 Ha. of the “old Seymour military camp” land is thus conserved.

The Royal Australian Armoured Corps at Puckapunyal are the custodians of “Light Horse” traditions. We also honour the first American Division to reach Australia (early 1942), and the Australian Army in toto. We have linkages with Turkey through our consultant architect and the Turkish Consul General.

Mitchell Shire is the first shire in the whole Goulburn Valley to enact a Trust for Nature Covenant (there are two so far).

I am very worried about the new and awful weeds – Bridal Creeper is seriously infesting Fryerstown near the cemetery. My step-daughter Clodagh removed the leafy bits but not the tuberous roots. The involvement of Council is surely needed. Have we any Myrtle Rust yet ?

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[ Colin has included a couple of pamphlets describing the “Colin Officer Flora Reserve”, a 13Ha reserve for native plants and birds on the Southern side of Broadford near the Golf Course. He neglected to mention that this was named in his honour. We are honoured that, having moved to Castlemaine, he has decided to join the CFNC ]

## **Two new Eucalypt species in the district**

Ern Perkins

In the recent issue of *Muelleria*, two of the local eucalypts have been separated out as new species.

The Brown Stringybarks in Muckleford Forest and Smiths Reef forest are now *Eucalyptus aurifodina*, differing from typical Brown Stringybarks by growing in drier places, and having smaller leaves and smaller fruit. Small-leaved Brown Stringybark would be a suitable common name. The scientific name refers to its habitat in the goldfields.

The Scent Barks growing at Glenluce are now called *Eucalyptus conferta*. The juvenile leaves are smaller and more crowded than typical scent barks. The scientific name refers to this feature.

## **Swift Parrot and Regent Honeyeater Surveys in the Mt Alexander Shire - May 2012**

By Chris Timewell and Lisa Minchin

The weekend of the 19-20 May 2012 was the first of the two annual survey weekends for the Swift Parrot (*Lathamus discolor*) and the Regent Honeyeater (*Anthochaera phrygia*) across south-eastern mainland Australia. In a compact team of two, we conducted a small number of short surveys within the central and eastern parts of the Mt Alexander Shire area on the 20<sup>th</sup> of May. Relatively few areas were found to have flowering eucalypts, and nectar-feeding birds were few and far between. Although we saw or heard neither of the two target species, an enjoyable time was had bird-watching in the fresh air.

We undertook bird surveys at the following locations:

1. Clinkers Hill Bushland Reserve, Castlemaine. The Victoria Gully Group has been doing a great job improving the condition of this little reserve (~3 ha) along the extension of Preshaw St over the past year. Unfortunately, a 20 minute search detected few species.
2. The trees and shrubs in and around the top of Saint St in Castlemaine have been known to attract a range of honeyeaters and other birds on occasions. A group of New Holland Honeyeaters were seen during a 20 minute search, with an Eastern Spinebill heard calling nearby.
3. A large group of White-winged Choughs tempted us to stop along Plantation Track in the Taradale Nature Conservation Reserve (NCR) for a 20 minute search, with the other highlight being an inquisitive Grey Shrike Thrush.
4. The old dam within the Taradale NCR was devoid of waterbirds, however, the surrounding slopes were found to be alive with a range of common woodland birds during a 20 minute search.
5. A gully near the western side of the Metcalfe Reserve (alongside the Metcalfe-Taradale Road) was found to have a good selection of woodland birds during our 20 minute check. Close views of a White-eared Honeyeater were the highlight.
6. A relaxing lunch break at the Metcalfe Cascades was notable for the healthy regenerating trees and shrubs and the pleasantly gurgling stream tumbling over rocks. Many more woodland birds were heard than seen in the 40 minutes that we spent there.
7. Our final destination (prior to a warming coffee at the Chewton General

Store) was the Dunstons Flat reserve along Golden Point Road. Yellow-tufted Honeyeaters, Scarlet Robins and a Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike were the highlights from this location during our 30 minute search. A small number of unidentified lorikeets (probably Little or Musk) were seen flying overhead.

The full results of our search are provided below, which includes the number of individuals seen at each site, flying overhead ('OH') or heard only ('H'). The next official Swift Parrot-Regent Honeyeater survey weekend is on 4-5 August 2012. Hopefully we'll have more luck this time. Details on the survey weekends are available from the Birdlife Australia website:

(<http://www.birdlife.org.au/projects/woodland-birds-for-biodiversity> ).

| Species Name               | 1    | 2    | 3  | 4    | 5 | 6    | 7 |
|----------------------------|------|------|----|------|---|------|---|
| Galah                      | 20OH | H    | -  | -    | - | -    | - |
| Long-billed Corella        | H    | -    | -  | -    | - | -    | H |
| Sulphur-crested Cockatoo   | -    | -    | -  | -    | - | 3 OH | - |
| Crimson Rosella            | 5    | -    | 5  | -    | - | 2    | 2 |
| Eastern Rosella            | -    | -    | -  | -    | - | -    | 1 |
| Brown Treecreeper          | -    | -    | -  | -    | 1 | -    | - |
| White-throated Treecreeper | -    | -    | 1  | H    | 1 | -    | - |
| Golden Whistler            | -    | -    | -  | -    | 1 | -    | - |
| Superb Fairy-wren          | -    | 1    | -  | 5    | - | 1    | 2 |
| Spotted Pardalote          | H    | -    | -  | -    | H | H    | - |
| Striated Pardalote         | -    | -    | -  | -    | - | H    | - |
| Weebill                    | -    | -    | -  | -    | - | H    | 1 |
| Brown Thornbill            | -    | -    | -  | -    | 7 | -    | - |
| Buff-rumped Thornbill      | -    | -    | -  | 6    | - | -    | - |
| Striated Thornbill         | -    | -    | -  | 4    | - | -    | - |
| Red Wattlebird             | H    | -    | -  | -    | - | H    | - |
| Yellow-tufted Honeyeater   | -    | -    | -  | -    | - | -    | 8 |
| White-eared Honeyeater     | -    | -    | -  | -    | 2 | H    | - |
| New Holland Honeyeater     | H    | 4    | -  | -    | - | -    | - |
| Eastern Spinebill          | -    | H    | -  | -    | - | -    | - |
| Scarlet Robin              | -    | -    | -  | -    | - | -    | 2 |
| Grey Shrike Thrush         | -    | -    | 2  | -    | - | -    | - |
| Grey Fantail               | -    | -    | -  | -    | 1 | -    | H |
| Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike  | -    | -    | -  | -    | - | -    | 1 |
| Australian Magpie          | 1    | -    | H  | H    | - | H    | H |
| Grey Currawong             | -    | H    | -  | H    | 1 | H    | - |
| Australian Raven           | -    | -    | -  | 1 OH | - | -    | - |
| Little Raven               | 1    | 2 OH | -  | -    | - | -    | - |
| White-winged Chough        | -    | -    | 40 | -    | - | -    | - |
| House Sparrow *            | -    | 5    | -  | -    | - | -    | - |
| Red-browed Finch           | -    | -    | -  | 3    | - | -    | - |
| Silvereye                  | -    | 10   | -  | -    | - | -    | - |
| Common Blackbird *         | -    | 3    | -  | -    | - | 1    | - |

## Launch of the Grass identification CD

At the July meeting Ern Perkins' CD entitled "Central Victorian Grasses" was officially launched. Introduced by Geoff Park, Ern gave a brief demonstration of the CD by video projector. It is very comprehensive and well constructed, and a great tool for self education on this topic.

## Wetlands on the Moolort Plains

Geoff Park's well illustrated presentation on the Moolort plains followed the CD launch. We learned that there are nearly 100 wetlands (maps show about 15) most of which are on private property. The floods of 2010 brought many to life which had almost disappeared in the drought. These wetlands occupy natural hollows formed when basalt lava flows coursed across the area in relatively recent times, associated with the extensive Newer Volcanics of the western plains south of the Divide.

The plains represent significant biodiversity, and attract a notable variety of birds, especially water birds in the wetlands and raptors on the mostly crop farmed plains. The wetlands are typically 5 to 25 Ha. in size and may be marshy vegetation, sometimes ringed by (or filled with) red gums. Moves are afoot to have some of these wetland habitats reserved.

## Observations

- ◆ At the July meeting:
- ◆ Reports of about 200 **Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos** in the Pine plantation; a "huge number" of Eastern Rosella in and around Tamagulla (seen by Doug); an unusual number of mixed flocks of bush birds seen lately; and Bursaria in flower! - Rita Mills
- ◆ Slippery Jacks also found in the Pine plantation – George Broadway
- ◆ Others reported a very large flock of Corella in Campbelltown, Rough Wattle starting to flower in Taradale, and courting Kookaburras.
- ◆ During July I have noticed some unusual visitors to my urban backyard – Eastern Spinebills (cover photo) have been rare in past years, but one or two have been daily visitors lately. Silvereyes also continue to drop in but in smaller numbers. And a rare visitor in late July - a Grey Fantail – Noel Young
- ◆ **Grey Butcherbird**. Chinamans Point on 17/5/12. This is only the second time that I have seen this bird locally. **Rainbow Lorikeet** - two birds, Doveton Street in Castlemaine. 4/7/12. My first local record. - Ern Perkins

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| <p><b>Disclaimer:</b> The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the club</p> |
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# Castlemaine Field Naturalists Programme

## August 2012

**Fri August 10 meeting:** speaker ERN PERKINS

on "Long Term Monitoring"

**Sat August 11 field trip:** Quadrats and photo-points in the  
Muckleford area with Ern Perkins

**Fri September 14 meeting:** speaker CASSIA READ on Bryophytes

### VISITORS ARE WELCOME AT CLUB ACTIVITIES

**General meetings** - (second Friday of each month, except January) are held in the Uniting Church (UCA) Hall (enter from Lyttleton St.) at 7.30 pm.

**Field Trips** - (Saturday following the general meeting) leave from the car park opposite Castle Motel, Duke Street at 1.30pm sharp unless stated otherwise. BYO morning and/or afternoon tea. Outdoor excursions are likely to be cancelled in extreme weather conditions. There are NO excursions on total fire ban days.

**Business meetings** - fourth Thursday of each month, except December, at George Broadways; 24a Greenhill Ave., at 7.30 pm. Members are invited to attend.

### Subscriptions for 2012

Ordinary membership: Single \$30, Family \$40

Pensioner or student: Single \$25, Family \$30

Subscription includes postage of the monthly newsletter, Castlemaine Naturalist

### 2012 Committee

|                             |                            |                           |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------|
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